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SUBJECT: MEDIA FRENZY AS AMBASSADOR REVISITS ADOPTION SITE

¶1. U.S.-China relations received an emotional boost December 3 as Ambassador Huntsman and wife Mary Kaye brought their daughter Gracie Mei to visit the city where they adopted her in 1999. Yangzhou officials and the Yangzhou Children's Welfare Institute spared no effort in preparing an ebullient homecoming for the Yangzhou-born Gracie and her parents. Local and national media followed suit, with extensive and positive stories highlighting the ambassador's personal connection to Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, and China. End summary

Banner: Welcome Home Yang Leyi

¶2. The Huntsmans' visit to Yangzhou, a city of 4.5 million on the north bank of the Yangtze river in Jiangsu province, was their first since adopting Gracie ten years ago this month. Yangzhou Party Secretary Ms. Wang Yanwen, calling Gracie by her Chinese name "Yang Leyi," proclaimed her an ambassador of Yangzhou. The Ambassador and family arrived at the Welfare Institute to a drum corps welcome and proceeded immediately to a tree-planting ceremony, welcome speeches by Yangzhou government officials including Party Secretary Wang and the Institute's Director Ms. Liu Aiping, and a tour through a newly-built facility. The visit concluded with a press conference.

Yangzhou Catches "Huntsman Fever"

¶3. Chinese media at both the national and the regional levels carried highly positive coverage of the Welfare Institute visit. In addition to talking about the strength of the bilateral relationship, the Ambassador noted that taking on his assignment to China carried additional personal significance. Many stories, especially by papers based in Jiangsu Province, hailed the visit as opening a new door for cooperation between the U.S. and Jiangsu. When asked about U.S.-China relations in the Jiangsu context, the Ambassador talked about the importance of both educational exchange and economic cooperation, ending by noting his own "ties of the heart."

Exposure Could Generate More Donations

¶4. Director Liu told Consul General that the Institute had previously welcomed back children who had been adopted by non-Chinese families to similar fanfare. The Institute's budget is largely dependent on government funding as part of the Yangzhou Civil Affairs Bureau, she explained, but is also supplemented by private donations. The positive media coverage generated by high profile visits such as the Ambassador's could result in increased donations to the Institute.

¶5. According to its website, the Yangzhou Children's Welfare Institute was first established in 1968 and moved to its present location in 1982. Foreign adoptions began in 1989. When asked by

Consulate EconOff whether recent trends pointed to growing Chinese government preference for domestic families over foreign families in adoption cases, Liu demurred, stating "our only concern is that these children are accepted into a loving family with sufficient resources to raise them."

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